



AGENDA REPORT SUMMARY

Meeting Date: January 24, 2023

Subject: City of Los Altos Outdoor Dining Program

Prepared by: Anthony Carnesecca, Economic Development Administrator

Reviewed by: Jon Maginot, Assistant City Manager

Approved by: Gabriel Engeland, City Manager

Attachment(s):

1. City of Los Altos Parklet Program Guide
2. City of Los Altos Sidewalk Dining Program Guide
3. City of Los Altos Outdoor Display Guide

Initiated by:

City staff

Previous Council Consideration:

November 19, 2019, August 28, 2020, & November 30, 2021

Fiscal Impact:

None.

Environmental Review:

Not applicable.

Policy Question(s) for Council Consideration:

- Does the City Council wish to provide any feedback on the Los Altos Outdoor Dining Program as presented today?

Summary:

- This program will allow businesses the option of having outdoor dining in the public right-of-way.

Staff Recommendation:

Provide feedback on the Los Altos Outdoor Dining Program.

City Manager

GE

Reviewed By:

City Attorney

JH

Finance Director

JD



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Purpose

The goals of the Los Altos Outdoor Dining Program are to:

1. Increase the vibrancy and atmosphere of Downtown Los Altos.
2. Stimulate local economy through improved outdoor dining spaces in sidewalks and parklets.
3. Encourage creative use of public spaces by activating sidewalks and adjacent areas.

Background

In June 2004, the Los Altos City Council approved a resolution establishing a downtown public sidewalk display permit program that “developed a set of sidewalk clearance guidelines and design criteria allowing for the placement of A-frame or similar signs, flowerpots, flower carts, statues, sculptures, or other similar decorative display items, and outdoor dining furniture on or over the public sidewalks in the downtown triangle area.” This allowed many businesses to display a-frames with store information on sidewalks and the only outdoor seating for restaurants.

In August 2018, the Los Altos City Council adopted the Downtown Vision. The vision provides the City of Los Altos with long-term improvements and short-term programs that will increase vibrancy in the downtown triangle. Outdoor dining was identified as an effective way to provide unique and positive dining opportunities for residents and visitors in Downtown Los Altos.

In November 2019, the Los Altos City Council unanimously approved the City of Los Altos Pilot Parklet Program. This pilot program was intended to allow restaurant owners to build parklets that would expand outdoor seating opportunities through Fall 2021 and would allow restaurants to have two full years with their parklets before a Council review of the program. These parklets were required to be built-out deck structures with design and construction specifications. This program limited the number of parklets on any given block downtown and prevented parklets from being installed across the street from one another.

In January 2020, City staff conducted preliminary meetings with numerous restaurants that were interested in a parklet installation. Many restaurants were interested, but some were hesitant to invest money on a parklet installation for a two-year period without a long-term timeline. No parklet applications were received from restaurants under the pilot program prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In summer 2020, the City began exploring potential options for restaurants to expand their outdoor dining space into the public right-of-way. Through many meetings with community stakeholders, the City decided to close sections of downtown streets for “Open Streets Los Altos” allowing restaurants to expand their outdoor seating area into the public right-of-way with approved permit application and proof of liability insurance. This program closed Main Street and State Street for pedestrian-only traffic every Thursday morning through Sunday night from June 2020 through September 2020.



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Open Streets Los Altos was successful in allowing restaurants to expand outdoor dining space as guidelines required tables to be ten feet apart from one another and keep diners six feet apart from one another at all times in compliance with social distancing guidelines provides by the County. Some neighboring businesses were frustrated with the sections of the block that did not have restaurants and large sections of the block were not fully utilized, while some businesses were frustrated with loss of on-street parking spaces adjacent to storefronts. City staff met with restaurants, retailers, and personal service businesses who indicated that parklets may be a middle ground solution allowing restaurants to have outdoor dining space while re-opening the street to vehicular traffic and open additional parking spaces near storefronts.

As Open Streets Los Altos came to a close, the City implemented the COVID Parklet Program in Fall 2020. Through the COVID Parklet Program, businesses installed a protective barrier of wine barrels filled with 500 lbs. of water, sand or concrete along the perimeter of the parklet. These barrels have created a unique and uniform feel to the parklets that make them unique to Los Altos. However, as time as passed, the barrels have weathered and fallen into disrepair as they were not designed for outdoor use over long periods of time.

As winter set-in and restaurants wanted to add canopies and heaters, SCC Fire Department became involved in helping us develop Outdoor Dining Winterization Guidelines that assured temporary parklets would comply with the State and County fire codes.

As of December 2022, the City has approved 20 parklet applications under the COVID Parklet Program. These 20 approved parklets are located at various restaurants in downtown that have allowed outdoor dining opportunities even with restrictions on indoor dining.

All 20 parklets meet the guidelines for the COVID Parklet Program. 5 parklets have deck-like structures as specified in the Pilot Parklet Program, but this was not required in order to keep cost and installation at a minimum under the COVID Parklet Program. None of the current parklets would meet the entire guidelines for the Parklet Pilot Program.

In November 2021, the Los Altos City Council approved a Permanent Parklet Program to go into effect at the end of the local emergency health order. As the emergency health order is still in effect, the permanent program has not been implemented.

In anticipation of the Governor planning to lift the State Emergency Health Order in February 2023, staff has reviewed the permanent parklet program as part of the City's Outdoor Dining Program. This review has prompted staff to identify improvements to the program, which includes lessons learned from the COVID Parklet Program.

The Los Altos Chamber of Commerce and Los Altos Village Association have reviewed the attached program guides and provided initial feedback that has been incorporated into the documents.



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City staff plans to present to the Los Altos Chamber of Commerce Government Affairs Committee on February 1, 2023 and have a direct Q&A session with business owners on February 2, 2023 where the programs with any amendments from the City Council Study Session will be presented for feedback.

City staff plans to return to City Council on February 14, 2023 with any necessary changes for formal approval of the Los Altos Outdoor Dining Program. At this meeting, City staff will request the following items:

- Extend the current COVID parklet program through June 30, 2023
- Adopt the City of Los Altos Resolution No. 2023-XX to amend the Los Altos Parklet Program
- Adopt the City of Los Altos Resolution No. 2023-XX to establish the Los Altos Sidewalk Dining Program
- Adopt the City of Los Altos Resolution No. 2023-XX to amend the Los Altos Outdoor Display Program

Discussion/Analysis

Parklet Program

Through the Pilot and COVID parklet programs and continued outreach with the business community, staff have learned a great deal about what will encourage restaurants to build and sustain great outdoor dining in Los Altos.

Staff recommends that the Permanent Parklet Program will go into effect once the current emergency health order expires. The City will allow current parklets to continue to operate under the COVID Parklet Program should this occur prior to June 30, 2023.

The amended long-term parklet program incorporates lessons learned through crafting both programs, seeing parklets built out under the COVID Parklet Program, and identifies some of the shortcomings in the programs that may be improved moving forward to maintain the high-level of parklets in downtown Los Altos.

Required adjustments to the Los Altos Parklet Program due to regulations include:

- Require greater distance from centerline to ensure safer vehicular traffic for emergency vehicles.
- Protected dining area with concrete barriers and metal railings instead of wine barrels for California ABC compliance.
- Canopy structures are prohibited for Fire Code compliance.

Proposed adjustments to the Los Altos Parklet Program due to lessons learned include:

- Require all parklets to include a wood platform structure that meets the sidewalk grade.
- Parklets limited to whichever is greater of either:



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- (1) All parking stalls within primary building frontage
 - (2) Four angular (on Main) or two parallel (on State) parking stalls.
- Establish annual program fee.

Changes to the program would go into effect thirty days after adoption, however restaurants will be allowed to begin the application process immediately. City staff will conduct an initial application review and on-site inspection along with regular checks to verify that the parklets are being maintained and comply with the Program Guide and applicable code requirements.

Sidewalk Dining Program

Currently, sidewalk dining is permitted under the Outdoor Display Program. Applicants apply to place outdoor dining furniture and outdoor displays as part of the same program. This process is illogical in that sidewalk dining and any outdoor displays should be divided into two categories with separate requirements. Staff recommends City Council adopt the Sidewalk Dining Program as part of the overall Outdoor Dining Program.

Businesses will have the option to apply for a Parklet Program Application or Sidewalk Dining Application. This will ensure that businesses identify the best outdoor dining option for each business and their customers.